

Noteworthy insects observed on Afton Down, Isle of Wight in 2001

Afton Down, also known as Compton Down, lies between Freshwater Bay and Compton Bay. There is a chalk-pit just off the road on the left where cars can park just before Compton Farm, travelling east. It faces due south and is a superb spot for many species of butterflies and other insects. In the past ten years I have recorded many of the earliest and latest dates of butterflies for the Isle of Wight in this locality. This area is an entomologist's paradise.

On the morning of 5 June, I visited this locality and it was not long before I noticed a fritillary which, at first sight, I thought must be a variety of the Glanville Fritillary *Melitaea cinxia* (L.). However, on closer inspection I was convinced that it was in fact a Marsh Fritillary *Euphydryas aurinia* (Rott.). During the afternoon, I revisited the site and was pleased to find that the butterfly was still there. This time I netted it, and have kept it as a voucher specimen to prove that it was this species. This butterfly was recorded at Parkhurst Forest in the early twentieth century and a strong colony was discovered by J. Wright at Cranmore in 1947: numbers gradually diminished, and none were seen since 1956. It was then introduced at two localities at Newtown in 1993, and survived there until May 1998. However, this example suggests that there may be a colony somewhere on the Island awaiting discovery.

On 6 September, I visited the chalk-pit and noticed a female wasp spider *Argiope bruennichi* (Scolopi) in a large web amongst long grass, just below a blackberry bush. The first example of this magnificent insect was recorded on the island on a field trip of the Isle of Wight Natural History & Arachnaeological Society at Hamstead Dover on 18 August 1979 (Pope, 1998. *Proc. Isle of Wight nat. Hist. archaeol. Soc.* **14**). Two more were recorded in August 1983, at Whippingham Churchyard and at Spinfish, Freshwater. This spider soon spread eastwards, becoming quite widespread, although there were no reports from the south of the Island until 1993, when it was found in August at Blackgang Ledge and Bonchurch. My example is a further record for the south coast of the Island and John Ralph has recently discovered it a few miles east of Afton Down at Alverstone. This spider remained in the same position for over a week before it disappeared. I noticed that it had successfully caught in its web a Small White *Pieris rapae* L. and later a Chalk-hill Blue *Lysandra coridon* (Poda). On the same day I observed several Great Green Grasshoppers *Tettigonia viridissima* L. and I have seen further examples there up to the beginning of October.

On 9 September, accompanied by Gillian Langton, I noticed a dark dragonfly flying from the road into the chalk-pit. It soon settled on some herbage where we had a very good sighting of it. With its jet black body and thorax, black legs and black pterostigma it was undoubtedly a Black Darter *Sympetrum danae* (Sulzer). This is the first authentic record for the Isle of Wight since K. G. Blair recorded it at Freshwater Marsh in 1950. Strangely enough, John Ralph saw a further example on 12 September at Alverstone, a few miles away. Whether this was the same insect as seen on Afton Down three days earlier remains a matter of conjecture.

On 29 September, I was visiting this locality when I disturbed a white moth which, on close inspection after it had settled, was an example of the migrant Pyralid *Palpita unionalis* (Hb.). This was the first record of the year on the Island for this species which is usually taken at light.

On a further visit on 3 October, I noticed a pair of Adonis Blues *Lysandra bellargus* (Rott.) *in copula*. The female was freshly emerged and possibly could be an example of a partial third brood. The rather tatty male was more likely to be a late second brood example.

There are several late butterfly dates worthy of mention. On 6 September I observed a Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris* (Poda) caught up in a spider's web. It was still alive and I managed to release it. The last Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus* (L.) and Chalkhill Blue *Lysandra coridon* (Poda) were seen on 3 October on Afton Down and a female Adonis Blue *Lysandra bellargus* (Rott.) was observed just above the chalk-pit on 5 October. This is the latest date that I have ever seen this butterfly.

It was the warmest October since records began in 1659 and the warm sunny weather continued right up to the end of the month. On a further visit to Afton Down on 27 October I saw a very late freshly emerged male Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina* L. which must have been an example of a partial second brood. The latest ever sighting in England of this species was on 2 November 1980 in Devon (Archer-Lock, *Ent. Rec.* 92: 266). On a sunny day on 31 October, I visited the same locality at eleven o'clock and noticed a small brownish butterfly flying at the top of the chalk-pit. I soon got close to it and observed that it was a female Long-tailed Blue *Lampides boeticus* L. It rested on some blackberry and sunned itself for several minutes before flying to another part of the chalk-pit. I went home to get a net but it had gone on my return. Other butterflies present on that day were two Painted Ladies *Cynthia cardui* (L.) and several Red Admirals *Vanessa atalanta* (L.). On 3 November, at noon, Andy Butler observed a further Long-tailed Blue in his garden at Ventnor. These are the first records for the Island for this species since the summer of 1952 when three were seen, one at Cranmore by J. Lobb, 30.vii.1952 (French, 1953, *Entom.* 86: 161) and a pair in my garden at Freshwater when my elder brother, Robin, succeeded in netting the female.

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***Boreus hyemalis* (L.) (Mec.: Boreidae), nearly new to Suffolk**

Two specimens of the Snow Flea *Boreus hyemalis* (L.) were found amongst moss at Cavenham Heath, Suffolk on 20 January 2002 by myself and Roger Northfield from Cambridge University Zoology Department. Both were male examples and found 'hopping' on the common heathland moss *Dicranum scoparium* (Hedw.) about two hours before dusk on a dull, wet and windy day that reached a maximum of 10 degrees Celsius. I reported our find to Colin Plant who informed me that this is the first formal record of *B. hyemalis* from Suffolk.

Our find was the result of a number of years searching (often on hands and knees) in appropriate Breckland habitat and is the first time I have seen *Boreus*, though Roger recalled seeing it more than 30 years earlier while searching Suffolk heathland